



DICÆUM HIRUNDINACEUM.

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## Swallow Dicæum.

- Sylvia hirundinacea*, Shaw, Nat. Misc., vol. iv. pl. 114.—Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. lv.  
*Swallow Warbler*, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 250.—Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. x. p. 613.  
*Pipra Desmaretii*, Leach, Zool. Misc., vol. i. p. 94. pl. 41.  
*Crimson-throated Honey-sucker*, Lewin, Birds of New Holl., pl. 7.  
*Desmaretian Manakin*, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. x. p. 18.—Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 240.  
*Dicæum atrogaster*, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 303.  
*Moo-ne-jê-tang*, Aborigines of the lowland districts of Western Australia.
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By far the greater number of the colonists of Australia are, I am sure, totally unacquainted with this beautiful little bird, yet there is scarcely an estate in either of the colonies in which it may not be found as a permanent resident or an occasional visitor: a closer examination of the birds, and other natural objects with which we are most nearly surrounded, would at all times repay with interest the trouble of their investigation.

The natural disposition of this species leading it to confine itself almost exclusively to the topmost branches of the loftiest trees, is doubtless the cause of its not being more generally observed; its rich scarlet breast, so strongly contrasting with the other parts of its plumage, not even attracting notice at the distance from the ground at which it generally keeps; and, in obtaining specimens, I was more frequently made aware of its presence by its pretty warbling song than by its movements among the branches; so small an object, in fact, is most difficult of detection among the thick foliage of the lofty *Casuarinæ*, to which trees it is extremely partial, particularly to those growing on the banks of creeks and rivers. It is also frequently to be seen among the branches of the beautiful parasite figured in the accompanying Plate: this charming *Loranthus* was gathered at Dartbrook, on the Upper Hunter, where it is very common on the *Casuarinæ*. Whether the bird is attracted to this misseltoe-like parasite, like many others, for the purpose of feeding upon its sweet and juicy berries, I could not fully make out; its chief food is insects, but in all probability it may partially feed on these fruits also.

The Swallow Dicæum has neither the actions of the Pardalotes nor of the Honey-eaters; it differs from the former in its quick darting flight, and from the latter in its less prying, clinging and creeping actions among the leaves, &c. When perched on a branch it sits more upright, and is more Swallow-like in its contour than either of the forms alluded to; the structure of its nest and the mode of its nidification are also very dissimilar.

Its song is a very animated and long-continued strain, but is uttered so inwardly, that it is almost necessary to stand beneath the tree upon which the bird is perched, before its notes can be heard.

It would appear that the range of this species extends to all parts of the Australian continent, since I have received specimens from every locality yet explored by Europeans. I found it breeding on the Lower Namoi, which proves that the interior of the country is inhabited by it as well as those portions between the ranges and the coast.

Its beautiful purse-like nest, of which the drawing will give a far better idea than the most minute description, is composed of the white cotton-like substance found in the seed-vessels of many plants, and among other trees is sometimes suspended on a small branch of a *Casuarina*, or an *Acacia pendula*. It was on the latter tree that I found a nest containing three or four young; a second nest with the eggs was given to me in Sydney. The ground-colour of the eggs is dull white, with very minute spots of brown scattered over the surface; they are nine lines long by five and a half lines broad.

The male has the head, all the upper surface, wings and tail black, glossed with steel-blue; primaries black; throat, breast, and under tail-coverts scarlet; flanks dusky; abdomen white, with a broad patch of black down the centre; irides dark brown; bill blackish brown; feet dark brown.

The female is dull black above, glossed with steel-blue on the wings and tail; throat and centre of the abdomen buff; flanks light brown; under tail-coverts pale scarlet.

The figures are of the natural size, on a branch of the *Loranthus* above mentioned, which I believe to be an undescribed species.